

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 7361

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TAGS: ASCH, GEN, NI

SUBJECT: AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LAGOS -
LAW SUIT

1. SUMMARY: AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LAGOS HAS BEEN SERVED NOTICE OF IMPENDING LAW SUIT BY MRS. MARY ONWUACHI, BLACK AMERICAN WIFE OF NIGERIAN PATRICK C. ONWUACHI, NEWLY APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, LAGOS, FOR ALLEGED DISCRIMINATORY SALARY SCALE BETWEEN AMERICAN AND NIGERIAN STAFF, FOR SCHOOL'S "ANTI-BLACK PREJUDICES" AND FOR ALLEGED BREACH OF CONTRACT WITH MRS. ONWUACHI. HER LAWYER CLAIMS 25,000 NAIRA DAMAGES AND THREATENS UNPLEASANT PUBLICITY IF PAYMENT NOT MADE. MRS. ONWUACHI HAS INDICATED INTENTION TO STIMULATE U.S. CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST, AND HER HUSBAND HAS THREATENED TO HAVE FMG WITHDRAW AIS

SUPERINTENDENT'S RESIDENCE PERMIT. AIS LAWYER IS CONFIDENT OF SCHOOL'S POSITION, BUT IT SEEMS CLEAR AIS AND EMBASSY ARE BOTH IN FOR ROUGH TIME ON THIS CASE. END SUMMARY.

2. MRS. ONWUACHI CAME TO LAGOS THIS SUMMER WITH HUSBAND, PROFESSOR ONWUACHI, WHO HAD BEEN INDUCED BY MEA PER SEC IYALLA TO RETURN FROM U.S. TO HEAD NIIA. SHE SOUGHT EMPLOYMENT WITH AIS AND IN JULY WAS OFFERED TEACHING CONTRACT ON LOCAL HIRE SCALE, WITH ORAL AGREEMENT THAT
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CONTRACT WAS SUBJECT HER ATTENDANCE AUGUST KINSHASA

TEACHING WORKSHOP. MRS. ONWUACHI SIGNED CONTRACT BUT SUBSEQUENTLY DEMANDED SALARY ON TACOMA HIRE SCALE. SCHOOL EXPLAINED IT HAD ONE SALARY SCALE FOR TEACHERS OF ANY NATIONALITY RECRUITED IN NIGERIA (SCALE IS DOUBLE THAT OF LOCAL SCHOOL SALARIES) AND ONE SCALE FOR SIX TEACHERS SECONDED FROM TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS. MRS. ONWUACHI REFUSED ACCEPT EXPLANATION AND CHARGED THAT AIS HAD DISCRIMINATORY SALARY SCALES FOR WHITES AND BLACKS AND THAT SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT WAS PREJUDICED AGAINST BLACKS. FACT THAT TEN BLACK AMERICANS, EIGHT OF THEM MARRIED TO NIGERIANS, ARE EMPLOYED AS AIS TEACHERS AND THAT OVERALL BLACK/WHITE TEACHER RATIO IS 40:60,(BLACK/WHITE STUDENT RATIO 13:87), MADE NO IMPRESSION ON HER OR HER HUSBAND, WHO HAD ENTERED FRAY. AT ABOUT SAME TIME MRS. ONWUACHI BEGGED OFF FROM ATTENDING FULL KINSHASA WORKSHOP. AIS AGREED ON PROVISION SHE ATTEND SECOND HALF OF WORKSHOP. SHE ACCEPTED THIS BUT RENEGED AND DID NOT ATTEND AT ALL. AIS SUPERINTENDENT TOLD HER THIS PREJUDICED HER EMPLOYABILITY IN OPEN CLASSROOM TEACHING POSITION. HE OFFERED HER OTHER TEACHING POSITION BUT SHE DECLINED TO SAY SHE WOULD WORK WITH HIM, AND WHEN HE SUGGESTED SUBSTITUTE TEACHING FOR TRIAL PERIOD SHE REFUSED.

3. BOTH PROFESSOR AND MRS. ONWUACHI AGAIN MADE CALLS ON EMBASSY OFFICERS, THREATENING BAD PUBLICITY FOR AIS AND EMBASSY, CONGRESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT, SUPERINTENDENT'S DEPORTATION, ETC., UNLESS MRS. ONWUACHI WERE EMPLOYED. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, AIS CONCLUDED NO FRUITFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH MRS. ONWUACHI WAS POSSIBLE AND CONSIDERED IT PREFERABLE FACE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES RATHER THAN SUCCUMB TO PRESSURE. LETTERS WERE MAILED MRS. ONWUACHI AUGUST 28 AND 31, TERMINATING HER CONTRACT IN ACCORDANCE THIRTY DAYS NOTICE PROVISION IN CONTRACT AND MAKING CONSOLATION PAYMENT OF ONE MONTH SALARY.

4. SEPTEMBER 5 MRS. ONWUACHI'S LAWYER WROTE AIS SUPERINTENDENT, CLAIMING AIS COULD NOT TERMINATE CONTRACT AS IT HAD NOT BEEN CONSUMMATED, CHARGING DISCRIMINATORY SALARY SCALES BETWEEN NIGERIANS AND AMERICANS, AND ASSERTING PREJUDICE AS AIS REASON FOR SEEKING TO TERMINATE

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CONTRACT. LAWYER DEMANDED 25,000 NAIRA (37,500 DOLLARS) DAMAGES WITHIN SEVEN DAYS OR HE WOULD COMMENCE LEGAL ACTION, WITH CONSEQUENT UNPLEASANT PUBLICITY FOR AIS. THE SCHOOL HAS ASKED ITS NIGERIAN LAWYER TO TAKE NECESSARY ACTION AND ACT AS SCHOOL'S SPOKESMAN FOR ENTIRE MATTER.

5. COMMENT: WHILE AIS LAWYER HAS LITTLE CONCERN ABOUT SCHOOL'S LEGAL POSITION IN CASE, IT SEEMS CLEAR AIS AND

EMBASSY ARE BOTH IN FOR UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY AND POSSIBLE
CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY. PER SEC IYALLA'S INTEREST IN
ONWUACHI'S CAUSE MAY ALSO GIVE RISE TO VISA PROBLEMS FOR
SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT AND POSSIBLY OTHER AMERICAN TEACHING
STAFF. WE BELIEVE THERE IS NO BASIS FOR RACIST CHARGE
AGAINST SUPERINTENDENT. UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES, EMBASSY SEES
NO EASY WAY OUT OF THIS UNPLEASANT SITUATION BUT WILL
SEEK TO LIMIT DAMAGE AS BEST IT CAN. REINHARDT

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